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(54) **VALVE ACTUATOR CONTROL SYSTEM AND METHOD OF USE**

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See application file for complete search history.

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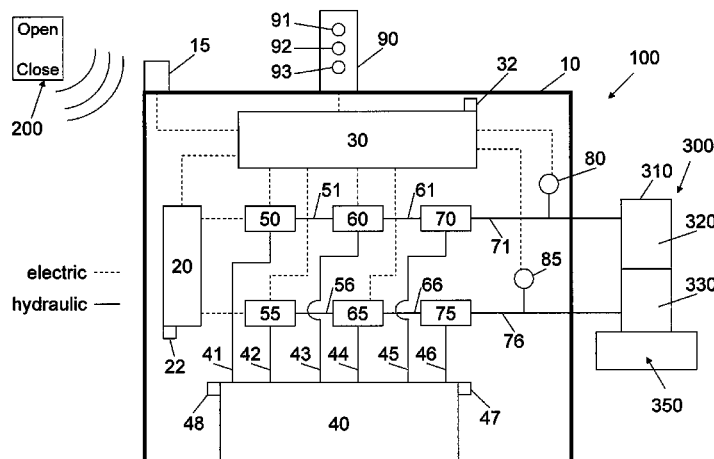
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ABSTRACT

A valve actuator control system for use with a valve actuator may include two pump assemblies, two control valve assemblies, two transducers, a fluid reservoir, and a controller assembly. The controller assembly may actuate the pump assemblies to direct fluid from the fluid reservoir to the valve actuator, and may actuate the control valve assemblies to direct fluid from the valve actuator to the fluid reservoir. A method of actuating a valve actuator using a valve actuator control system may comprise sending a signal to the valve actuator control system, injecting pressurized fluid from a fluid reservoir of the valve actuator control system into a first chamber of the valve actuator, discharging pressurized fluid from a second chamber of the valve actuator into the fluid reservoir, and actuating the valve actuator from a first position to a second position.

5 Claims, 4 Drawing Sheets



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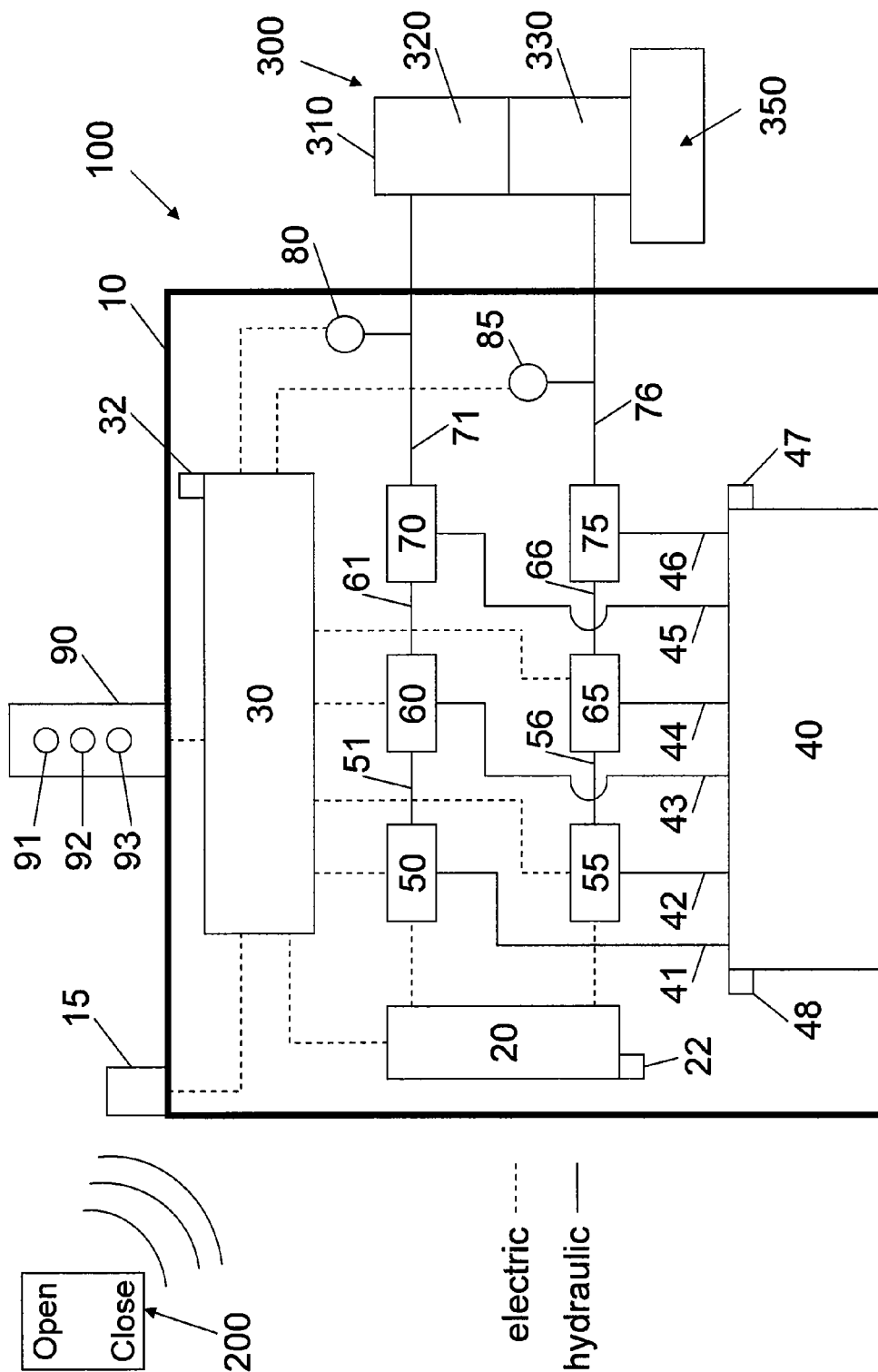


Figure 1

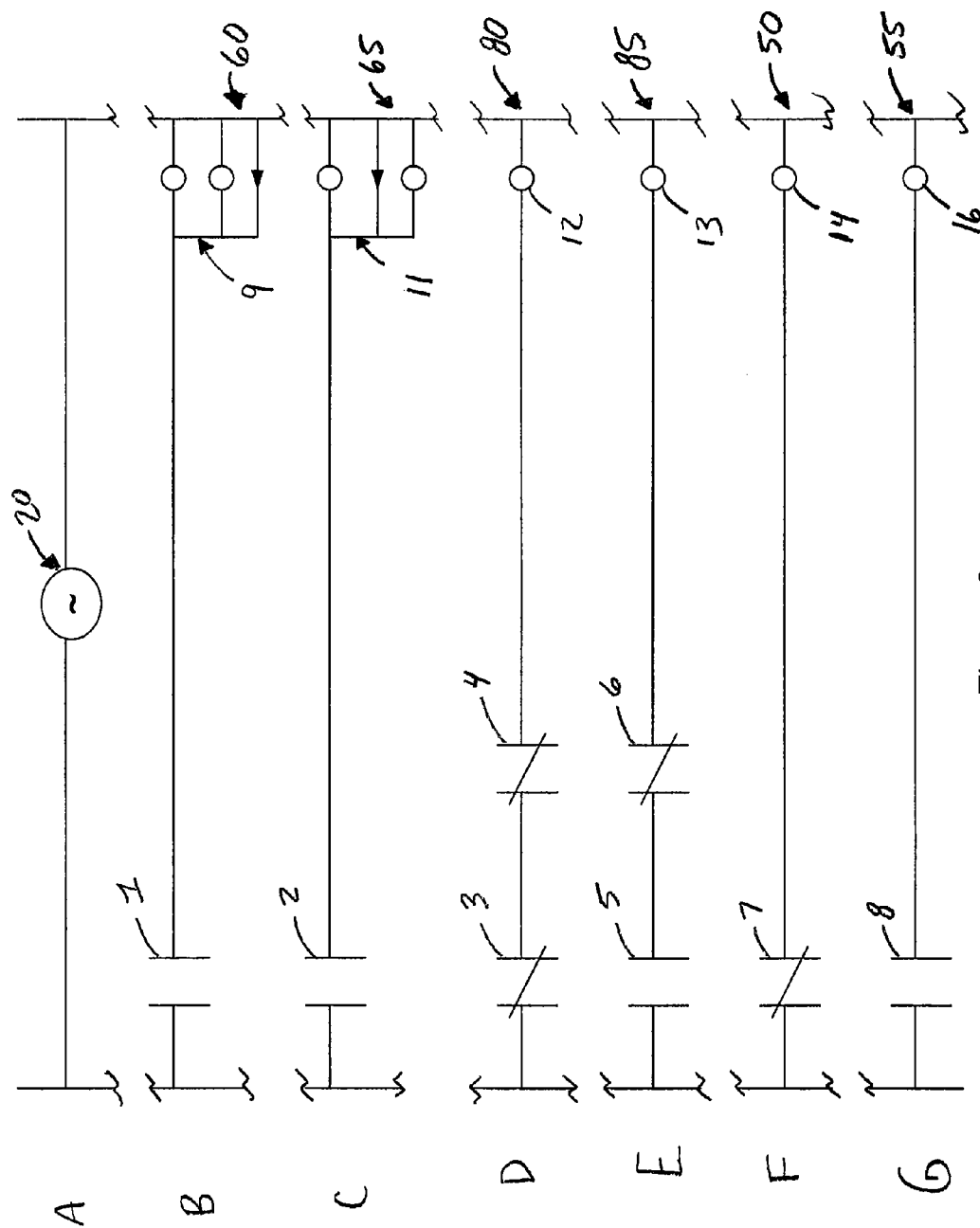


Figure 2

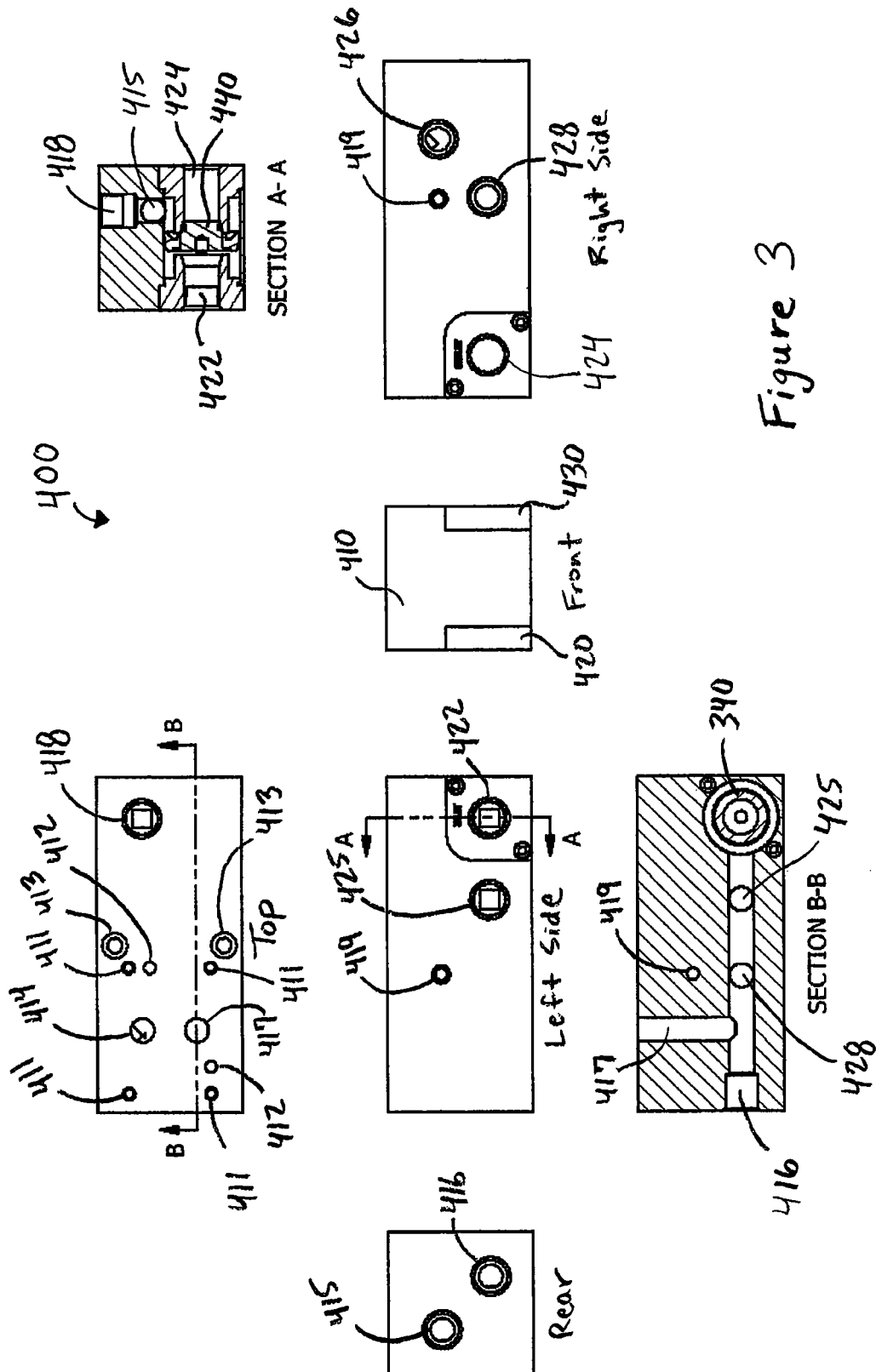
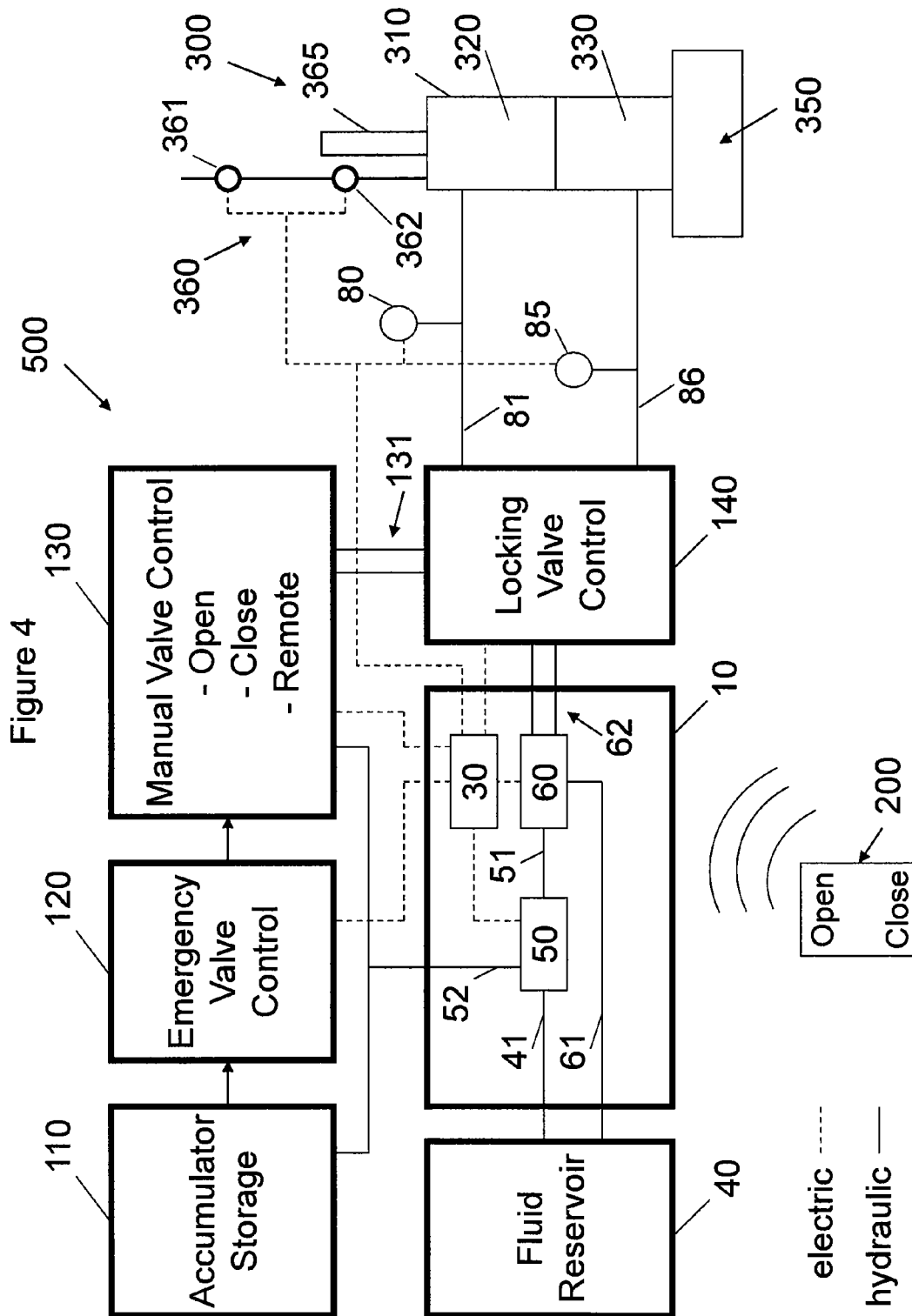


Figure 3

Figure 4



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VALVE ACTUATOR CONTROL SYSTEM AND METHOD OF USE

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

This application claims benefit of U.S. provisional patent application Ser. No. 61/384,145, filed Sep. 17, 2010; U.S. provisional patent application Ser. No. 61/497,470, filed Jun. 15, 2011; and U.S. provisional patent application Ser. No. 61/497,828, filed Jun. 16, 2011. Each of these applications is incorporated herein by reference in its entirety.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

Embodiments of the invention generally relate to systems and methods for controlling a valve from a remote location. Particularly, embodiments of the invention relate to a self-contained control system for hydraulically actuating a valve actuator, the self-contained control system operable via a remote control device. More particularly, embodiments of the invention relate to a remotely operated, self-contained control system for operating a double acting hydraulic valve actuator to open and close a valve.

2. Description of the Related Art

Multiple valves may be used to control the flow of fluids through widespread and complex pipeline systems. Fluids can be directed to various locations by opening and closing the valves, thereby opening and closing certain fluid circuits of the pipeline system. These valves may be physically located miles apart from each other and may require manual operation to open and close the valves. An extensive amount of time and energy is required to direct and re-direct fluid through the pipeline system using manually operated valves.

Valves are also used as part of wellhead systems that control the flow of fluid to and from an underground reservoir to conduct various wellbore operations. One such operation is known as a hydraulic fracturing operation, during which extremely high pressure fluid is supplied downhole to fracture the reservoir. During the fracturing operation, the area surrounding the wellhead system and the wellhead valves may be subjected to dangerously high levels of pressure. It may be necessary, however, to operate the valves at some point during the fracturing operation. Remote communications may be limited or restricted in the operating field during such type of wellbore operations, thereby requiring manual operation of the wellhead valves and subjecting the valve operators to the dangerous environment.

Therefore, there is a need for new and improved valve control systems and methods that are self reliant and can be remotely operated using minimal remote communication when desired.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

In one embodiment, a valve actuator control system for use with a valve actuator may comprise a first and second pump assembly; a first and second control valve assembly; a fluid reservoir in communication with the pump assemblies and the control valve assemblies; and a controller assembly operable to actuate the pump assemblies to direct fluid from the fluid reservoir to the valve actuator, and operable to actuate the control valve assemblies to direct fluid from the valve actuator to the fluid reservoir.

In one embodiment, a method of actuating a valve actuator using a valve actuator control system may comprise injecting

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pressurized fluid from a fluid reservoir of the valve actuator control system into a first chamber of the valve actuator; discharging pressurized fluid from a second chamber of the valve actuator into the fluid reservoir; and actuating the valve actuator from a first position to a second position.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

So that the manner in which the above recited features of the invention can be understood in detail, a more particular description of the invention, briefly summarized above, may be had by reference to embodiments, some of which are illustrated in the appended drawings. It is to be noted, however, that the appended drawings illustrate only typical embodiments of this invention and are therefore not to be considered limiting of its scope, for the invention may admit to other equally effective embodiments.

FIG. 1 illustrates a valve actuator control system according to one embodiment.

FIG. 2 illustrates a schematic of the valve actuator control system according to one embodiment.

FIG. 3 illustrates a relief valve assembly according to one embodiment.

FIG. 4 illustrates a valve actuator control system according to one embodiment.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

FIG. 1 illustrates a valve actuator control system **100** for a valve actuator **300** according to one embodiment. The valve actuator control system **100** may be remotely operated via a remote control device **200** to actuate the valve actuator **300** to open and close a valve **350** that is connected to the valve actuator **300**. Hydraulic fluid may be supplied from that valve actuator control system **100** to the valve actuator **300** to actuate the valve **350** upon receiving a signal from an operator via the remote control device **200** at a location remote from the valve **350**.

The valve actuator control system **100** may be “self-contained,” which means that it does not depend on any external pneumatic, hydraulic, mechanical, or electrical sources for its operation to actuate the valve actuator **300**, with limited exception depending on various embodiments. One exception including a signal sent to the controller assembly **30** via the remote control device **200** and the receiver **15**. Another exception including solar energy provided by the sun to recharge and/or power the power source **20** according to one embodiment. In general, all of the operating fluids and mechanisms necessary to operate the valve actuator **300** are maintained within the valve actuator control system **100** to effectively open and close the valve **350** with minimal, if any, additional external dependency.

In one embodiment, the valve actuator control system **100** may include a housing **10**, a receiver **15**, a power source **20**, a controller assembly **30**, a fluid reservoir **40**, a first and second pump assembly **50**, **55**, a first and second control valve assembly **60**, **65**, and a first and second relief valve assembly **70**, **75**. The valve actuator control system **100** may include a first and second transducer **80**, **85**, and an indication device **90**. Numerous hydraulic and electric lines may provide communication between one or more components of the valve actuator control system **100** as described herein. Embodiments relating to the components of control system **200**, including controller assembly **220** described and illustrated in at least FIG. 2 of U.S. Provisional Patent Application Ser. No. 61/370,721, entitled “Safety Valve Control System and Method of Use,” filed Aug. 4, 2010, the disclosure of which is

herein incorporated by reference in its entirety, may be used with the embodiments of the valve actuator control system **100** described herein.

In one embodiment, the housing **10** may include any structural support member, such as an explosion proof container, for protecting and supporting the components stored therein from damage and environmental elements. Appropriate ventilation of the housing **10** may be provided by ventilation holes and/or an independent solar powered fan mounted in or through the housing **10**. The housing **10** may further include an access panel or door for ease of access to the housing's interior, and may be configured for attachment to any type of support structure, including the valve actuator **300** and the valve **350**. One or more manifold assemblies may be provided on the housing **10** for fluid and/or electrical connection between the housing **10** and the components within the housing **10** and the valve actuator **300**, the valve **350**, the receiver **15**, the indication device **90**, and/or any other components external to the housing **10**. In one embodiment, the structural components of the valve actuator control system **100**, to the extent possible, may be made from stainless steel.

In one embodiment, the power source **20** may provide power to the receiver **15**, the controller assembly **30**, the first and second pump assemblies **50**, **55**, and/or the indication device **90**. The power source **20** may be operable to provide a low current (amp) stream to these various components. In one embodiment, the power source **20** may include an intrinsically-safe battery, such as a 12 or 24 volt, direct current, explosion proof power supply. In one embodiment, the power source **20** may include a watchdog sensor **22** to communicate to an operator at a remote location via the controller assembly **30** a failure of the power source **20**. The watchdog sensor **22** may also give an auditory or visual alarm to alert an operator onsite that the power source **20** is low and/or dead. The controller assembly **220** may be configured to automatically open and/or close the valve **350** upon receiving a signal from the watchdog sensor **22**. In one embodiment, the power source **20** may be a (re-chargeable) power supply that is supported by a solar panel assembly. The solar panel assembly may include one or more solar panels connected to the exterior of the housing **10** to consume light energy from the sun to generate electricity. An intrinsically safe voltage controller may deliver electrical current at an appropriate voltage, 12 or 24 volts for example, to the power source **20**, which in turn supplies power to the components of the valve actuator control system **100**.

In one embodiment, the controller assembly **30** may be weather-proof, and may be intrinsically safe to provide power as necessary to one or more components of the valve actuator control system **100**. In one embodiment, the controller assembly **30** may include a series of relays operable to open and close the necessary electrical connections between the valve actuator control system **100** components to facilitate actuation of the valve actuator **300** as described herein. In one embodiment, the controller assembly **30** may include first, second, and third relays, further discussed with respect to FIG. **2**. The first relay may include a "latching" relay that is operable remain in a specific position without power flow until it is activated to move to another position. The first relay may be used to facilitate operation of the first and second control valve assemblies **60**, **65**, as further described below. The second and third relays may be used with the first and second transducers **80**, **85** to facilitate operation of the first and second pump assemblies **50**, **55**, respectively, as further described below.

In one embodiment, the controller assembly **30** may include a programmable micro-processing unit having a dis-

play screen and a keypad operable to communicate with and control the valve actuator control system **100** components to actuate the valve actuator **300** as described herein. For example, the controller assembly **30** may include a programmable logic controller, including a supervisory control and data acquisition system (SCADA) that is in communication with the receiver **15**, the power source **20**, the first and second pump assemblies **50**, **55**, the first and second control valve assemblies **60**, **65**, the first and second transducers **80**, **85**, and/or the indication device **90**. A current regulator may be used to provide low current transmission between the controller assembly **30** and the various components of the valve actuator control system **100**. A watchdog sensor **32** may be used to monitor the operation of the controller assembly **30** and provide an alarm in the event of a failure.

In one embodiment, the controller assembly **30** may be operable to send and/or receive signals directly with the remote control device **200** and/or with the use of the receiver **15**. The remote control device **200** may include a one-way or two-way remote control, and/or a computer system (such as a desktop computer, laptop computer, or personal digital assistant), which can be used at a remote location from the valve actuator control system **100**. In one embodiment, signals may be sent and/or received between the controller assembly **30**, the receiver **15**, and/or the remote control system **200** via wired and/or wireless telemetry means, including but not limited to electrical wires, fiber optical cables, radio frequency, infrared, microwave, and/or laser light communication. In this manner, the valve actuator control system **100** can be monitored and operated remotely from one or more locations on-site or off-site relative to the valve actuator control system **100**. In one embodiment, the valve actuator control system **100** may be configured for manual and/or remote operation on-site at the location of the valve actuator **300** and the valve **350**. Manual operation may include a hand pump assembly to pump fluid from the fluid reservoir **40** to the valve actuator **300**, and/or a manual override assembly to actuate the valve actuator **300**, thereby opening and closing the valve **350**. In one embodiment, the remote control device **200** may be wired directly to the valve actuator control system **100**, and may be coupled to an exterior of or disposed within the housing **10** (or another structure/enclosure adjacent the valve actuator control system **100**) for access to on-site remote operation.

In one embodiment, the fluid reservoir **40** may be configured to store an amount of operating fluid sufficient to actuate the valve actuator **300**. In one embodiment, the fluid reservoir **40** may be configured to compensate for loss of fluid within the control valve system **100** that is used to actuate the valve actuator **300**. The operating fluid may include air, water, propylene glycol, and other valve operating fluids known in the art. In one embodiment, the fluid reservoir **40** may include a level gauge **47**, such as a sight glass, to indicate the level of fluid in the fluid reservoir **40**. The fluid reservoir **40** may also include a level sensor **48** that is in communication with the controller assembly **30** and is operable to monitor in real-time the level of fluid in the fluid reservoir **40**. In the event that the level of fluid falls below a pre-set limit, due to a small leak of the fluid for example, the level sensor **48** may provide an alarm to alert an operator on-site near the valve actuator control system **100** and/or at the remote location via the controller assembly **30** and the remote control device **200**. The controller assembly **30** may automatically open or close that valve **350** upon receiving a signal from the level sensor **48**.

In one embodiment, the first and second pump assemblies **50**, **55** may include an intrinsically safe and/or explosion

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proof motor and a pump. The first and second pump assemblies **50**, **55** may include positive displacement/rotary piston pumps with about a 100 to 10,000 psi range. In one embodiment, the first and second pump assemblies **50**, **55** may be rated for about 200 psi to about 300 psi. In one embodiment, one or more of the components of the valve actuator control system **100** may be rated for up to about 2500 psi. The first and second pump assemblies **50**, **55** may be configured to pump hydraulic and/or pneumatic fluid from the fluid reservoir **40** to the valve actuator **300** to operate the valve **350**. In one embodiment, a single reversible pump assembly may be used to facilitate operation of the valve actuator **300** as described herein.

In one embodiment, the first and second control valve assemblies **60**, **65** may include one or more intrinsically safe solenoid valves operable to control and direct communication between the first and second pump assemblies **50**, **55**, respectively, the fluid reservoir **40**, and the valve actuator **300**. In particular, the first and second control valve assemblies **60**, **65** may be operable to open and close the fluid circuits between the first and second pump assemblies **50**, **55**, respectively, the fluid reservoir **40**, and the valve actuator **300**. The controller assembly **30** may be used to control operation (e.g. open and close) of the first and second control valve assemblies **60**, **65** to thereby control actuation of the valve actuator **300** as desired.

In one embodiment, the first and second relief valve assemblies **70**, **75** may include one or more pressure controlled shuttle valves operable to control and direct communication between the first and second pump assemblies **50**, **55**, respectively, the fluid reservoir **40**, and the valve actuator **300**. In particular, the first and second relief valve assemblies **70**, **75** may be operable to open and close the fluid circuits between the first and second pump assemblies **50**, **55**, respectively, the fluid reservoir **40**, and the valve actuator **300** to rapidly expel fluid from the valve actuator **300** to the fluid reservoir **40** to ensure rapid open and or closure of the valve **350**. A pressure change in a fluid circuit that is in communication with the first and second relief valve assemblies **70**, **75** may actuate the valve assemblies to open and/or close another fluid circuit, thereby allowing fluid pressure to flow into the valve actuator **300** and/or allowing quick relief of fluid pressure to flow out of the valve actuator **300**.

FIG. 3 illustrates a front, rear, top, right side, and left side view, including two cross sectional views A-A and B-B, of a relief valve assembly **400** according to one embodiment. The relief valve assembly **400** may be used as the first and/or second relief valve assemblies **70**, **75** described herein. The relief valve assembly **400** includes a body **410**, a first seat **420**, and a second seat **430**. The first and/or second seats **420**, **430** may be removably secured to the body **410** for accessing a gate **440** that is movably disposed in the body **410** to control fluid communication therethrough. The body **410** may be provided with one or more mounting holes **411**, **412**, **413** for securing the relief valve assembly **400** within the housing **10** and/or to one or more components of the valve actuator control system **100**. The body **410** may include a first fluid inlet **416** for receiving fluid from at least one of the pump assemblies **50**, **55**. Second and third fluid inlets **422**, **425** (the second fluid inlet **422** being disposed through the first seat **420**) may also be provided to receive fluid from the pump assemblies **50**, **55**. In one embodiment, one of the fluid inlets **416**, **425**, **422** may be used during operation of the valve actuator control system **100**, while the other fluid inlets are plugged with one or more sealing members.

The body **410** may also include a first fluid outlet **415** for directing fluid to at least one of the first and second chambers

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320, **330** to actuate the valve actuator **300**. A second fluid outlet **418** may also be provided to direct fluid to at least one of the chambers **320**, **330**. In one embodiment, one of the fluid outlets **415**, **418** may be used during operation of the valve actuator control system **100**, while the other fluid outlet is plugged with one or more sealing members. During operation, fluid may flow through at least one of the fluid inlets **416**, **422**, **425** past the gate **440**, and then through at least one of the fluid outlets **415**, **418**, via one or more fluid paths. While fluid is flowing through the relief valve assembly **400** to the valve actuator **300**, the pressure in the body **410** forces the gate **410** to seal off communication with a first relief outlet **424**, as illustrated in Section A-A. The first relief outlet **424** provides fluid communication to the fluid reservoir **40**, to dump the fluid in the body **410** and the valve actuator **300** when desired during operation. A second relief outlet **428** may also be provided to quickly release fluid from the body **410** and the valve actuator **300**. The second relief outlet **428** may include a fluid path that intersects the fluid path of the first inlet **416**, as illustrated in Section B-B. The second relief outlet **428** may include an in-line relief valve to release fluid from the fluid paths to the fluid reservoir **40**, in the event that the pressure in the body **410** exceeds a predetermined pressure. A pressure switch port **419** may be disposed through the body **410** and intersects the fluid path of the first fluid outlet **415**. The pressure switch port **419** may be used as a means to communicate the pressure in the body **410** to at least one of the first and second transducers **80**, **85**. Using the pressure measured by the first and second transducers **80**, **85** via the pressure switch port **419**, the transducers **80**, **85** may selectively control, e.g. turn on and off, the pump assemblies **50**, **55** to actuate the actuator **300** as described herein.

Finally, the body **410** may include a fluid control outlet **417** that directs flow from the fluid path of the first fluid inlet **416** to at least one of the first and second control valve assemblies **60**, **65**. The body **410** may also include a fluid control inlet **414** that receives fluid from at least one of the first and second control valve assemblies **60**, **65** that directs flow into the fluid path of the first fluid outlet **415**. A second fluid control outlet **426** may be provided to release fluid from the body **410** and at least one of the first and second control valve assemblies **60**, **65** to the fluid reservoir **40**. When the first and second control valve assemblies **60**, **65** are actuated to dump fluid pressure to the fluid reservoir **40**, the pressure release in the fluid path of the first fluid inlet **416** and the back pressure in the fluid path of the first fluid outlet **415** may force the gate **440** from the position shown in Section A-A to a position where the fluid in the body **410** and the valve actuator **300** is quickly released to the fluid reservoir **40**. In this manner, a first relief valve assembly **400** may be used to supply and maintain fluid in one of the chambers **320**, **330** of the valve actuator **300**, while a second relief valve assembly **400** is used to quickly release and dump fluid from the other chamber of the valve actuator **300** to the fluid reservoir **40**.

In one embodiment, the first and second transducers **80**, **85** may include pressure sensors operable sense the pressure in the fluid circuits of the valve actuator control system **100**. The pressure sensors may be configured to start and/or stop the first and second pump assemblies **50**, **55**, respectively, when the pressure in the fluid circuits and/or valve actuator **300** reaches a pre-determined and/or pre-set pressure. The pressure sensors may be in communication with the first and second pump assemblies **50**, **55** directly and/or via the controller assembly **30**. In one embodiment, the first and second transducers **80**, **85** may include one or more gauges that can be visually inspected to monitor the pressure in the fluid circuits of the valve actuator control system **100**.

In one embodiment, the indication device **90** may include an intrinsically safe, light-emitting diode (LED) assembly configured to provide a visual indication corresponding to the position of the valve **350**. The indication device **90** may include a first indicator **91**, a second indicator **92**, and a third indicator **93** that communicate a visual signal to an operator located at a remote location relative to the control valve system **100** corresponding to a position of the valve **350**. In one embodiment, the first indicator **91** may be a green lit LED that provides a green light when the valve **350** is in the open position. In one embodiment, the second indicator **92** may be a yellow lit LED that provides a yellow light when the valve **350** is transitioning between the open and closed position. In one embodiment, the third indicator **93** may be a red lit LED that provides a red light when the valve **350** is in the closed position. The LED lights may be continuous or flashing. In one embodiment, the indication device **90** may be configured to provide an auditory signal to an operator remote from the location of the control valve system **100** corresponding to a position of the valve **350**.

In one embodiment, the valve actuator **300** may be a (balanced or unbalanced stem) double acting valve actuator having a housing **310**, a first pressure chamber **320**, a second pressure chamber **330**, and a piston disposed within the housing **310** between the pressure chambers. Pressurization of the first pressure chamber **320** moves the piston in a first direction, and pressurization of the second pressure chamber **330** moves the piston in a second direction that is opposite the first direction. In one embodiment, only a minimal pressure differential, in a range of about 30 psi to about 40 psi, between the first and second chambers **320**, **330** may be required to move the piston. The valve actuator **100** may also include a valve stem connected to the piston at a first end and connected to the valve **350** at a second end to position the valve **350** in an open and closed position upon pressurization of the pressure chambers. Another valve stem may be connected to the piston that extends through the housing **310** to provide a visual indication of the position of the valve actuator **300** and valve **350**. The additional valve stem extending from the housing **310** may also be used to manually actuate the valve actuator **300**. In one embodiment, in the event of a failure, the valve actuator **300** may be configured to “fail-as-is,” fail in a closed position, or fail in an open position. Other types of valve actuators and valves known in the art may be used with the embodiments described herein.

In one embodiment, the first control valve assembly **60** and the first relief valve assembly **70** may be integrated into a single manifold system that is in communication with the first pump assembly **50** and the first chamber **320**. The integrated manifold system may have a single exhaust fluid circuit to return fluid from the first chamber **320** to the fluid reservoir **40**. The second control and relief valve assemblies **65** and **75** may be similarly combined.

In one embodiment, the valve actuator control system **100** is operable to direct pressurized fluid to the first chamber **320** from the second chamber **330** of the valve actuator **300** upon receiving a signal from the remote control device **200**, thereby opening the valve **350**. The valve actuator control system **100** is also operable to direct pressurized fluid from the first chamber **320** to the second chamber **330** of the valve actuator **300** upon receiving a signal from the remote control device **200**, thereby closing the valve **350**. A single remote control device **200** may be configured to operate one or more valve actuator control systems **100**, which may be configured to operate one or more valve actuators **300**, which may be configured to operate one or more valves **350**. The valve actuator control

system **100** may be operable to actuate the valve actuator **300** multiple times per day via the remote control device **200**.

Pressurization of the first chamber **320** via a first fluid circuit comprising conduits **41**, **51**, **61**, and **71** that is in communication with the fluid reservoir **40** (and the second chamber **330**) may actuate the valve actuator **300** to open the valve **350**. Fluid pressure in the first chamber **320** may be discharged into the fluid reservoir **40** via a quick relief circuit comprising conduit **45** that is in communication with the first fluid circuit. Fluid pressure in the first fluid circuit may also be discharged into the fluid reservoir **40** via an exhaust circuit comprising conduit **43** that is in communication with the first fluid circuit. The first pump assembly **50**, the first control valve assembly **60**, the first relief valve assembly **70**, and the first transducer **80** are in communication with the first fluid circuit to deliver and relieve pressurized fluid to and from the first chamber **320** of the valve actuator **300**.

Pressurization of the second chamber **330** via a second fluid circuit comprising conduits **42**, **56**, **66**, and **76** that is in communication with the fluid reservoir **40** may actuate the valve actuator **300** to close the valve **350**. Fluid pressure in the second chamber **330** may be discharged into the fluid reservoir **40** via a quick relief circuit comprising conduit **46** that is in communication with the second fluid circuit. Fluid pressure in the second fluid circuit may also be discharged into the fluid reservoir **40** via an exhaust circuit comprising conduit **44** that is in communication with the second fluid circuit. The second pump assembly **55**, the second control valve assembly **65**, the second relief valve assembly **75**, and the second transducer **85** are in communication with the second fluid circuit to deliver and relieve pressurized fluid to and from the second chamber **330** of the valve actuator **300**.

To describe a first operation of the valve actuator control system **100**, assume that the valve **350** is in a closed position. When the valve **350** is in the closed position, the second chamber **330** is pressurized. The second control valve assembly **65** maintains pressure in the conduit **66**, which closes the second relief valve assembly **75**. The second relief valve assembly **75** maintains pressure in the conduit **76** and thus in the second chamber **330**, thereby maintaining the valve **350** in the closed position. The second transducer **85** is operable to monitor the pressure in the conduit **76** and thus in the second chamber **330**. In the event that the pressure in the second chamber **330** falls below a pre-determined pressure setting (e.g. due to a loss of fluid) the second transducer **85** may actuate the second pump assembly **55** to provide additional pressurized fluid from the fluid reservoir **40** to the second chamber **330** to maintain the pressure in the second chamber **330** at or above the pre-determined pressure setting.

When it is desired to open the valve **350**, an operator may transmit a signal from a remote location, such as a wired and/or wireless location up to 200 feet to 300 feet away and/or several miles away, using the remote control device **200** to the valve actuator control system **100** to actuate the valve actuator **300** to open the valve **350**. The signal may be generated by operating the remote control device **200**. The signal may be received by the receiver **15** and communicated to the controller assembly **30**, and/or may be directly received by the controller assembly **30**. Upon receiving the signal, the controller assembly **30** may actuate the second control valve assembly **65** to relieve the pressure in the conduits **56** and **66** via the exhaust circuit, i.e. conduit **44**, to the fluid reservoir **40**. The pressure drop in the conduit **66** will then actuate the second relief valve assembly **75** to quickly relieve the fluid pressure in the conduit **76** and in the second chamber **330** via the quick relief circuit, i.e. conduit **46**. Upon receiving the signal, the

controller assembly 30 may also prevent the second transducer 85 from actuating the second pump assembly 55.

During the discharge of pressurized fluid from the second chamber 330, the controller assembly 30 may actuate the first pump assembly 50 and/or the first control valve assembly 60 to direct pressurized fluid from the fluid reservoir 40 to the first chamber 320 of the valve actuator 300. As the first chamber 320 is pressurized, the valve actuator 300 begins to move the valve 350 from the closed position to the open position. The controller assembly 30 may also activate the first transducer 80 to monitor the pressure in the conduit 71 and thus in the first chamber 320. When the pressure in the first chamber 320 reaches a pre-determined pressure, the first transducer 80 is operable to turn off the first pump assembly 50, directly and/or via the controller assembly 30. The first control valve assembly 60 maintains pressure in the conduit 61, which closes the first relief valve assembly 70. The first relief valve assembly 70 maintains pressure in the conduit 71 and thus in the first chamber 320, thereby maintaining the valve 350 in the open position. The first transducer 80 is operable to continuously monitor the pressure in the conduit 71 and thus in the first chamber 330. In the event that the pressure in the first chamber 320 falls below a pre-determined pressure setting (e.g. due to a loss of fluid) the first transducer 80 may actuate the first pump assembly 50 to provide additional pressurized fluid from the fluid reservoir 40 to the first chamber 320 to maintain the pressure in the first chamber 320 at or above the pre-determined pressure setting.

When it is desired to close the valve 350, the operator may transmit a signal via the remote control device 200 to the valve actuator control system 100 to actuate the first control valve assembly 60 to relieve the pressure in the conduits 51 and 61 via the exhaust circuit, i.e. conduit 43, to the fluid reservoir 40. The pressure drop in the conduit 61 will then actuate the first relief valve assembly 70 to quickly relieve the fluid pressure in the conduit 71 and in the first chamber 330 via the quick relief circuit, i.e. conduit 45. The controller assembly 30 may also prevent the first transducer 80 from actuating the first pump assembly 50. During the discharge of pressurized fluid from the first chamber 320, the controller assembly 30 may actuate the second pump assembly 55 and/or the second control valve assembly 65 to direct pressurized fluid from the fluid reservoir 40 to the second chamber 320 to move the valve 350 from the open to the closed position. The controller assembly 30 may also activate the second transducer 85 to continuously monitor the pressure in the conduit 76 and turn the second pump assembly 55 off or on when the pressure in the second chamber 330 reaches or is below a pre-determined pressure, as stated above. The second control valve assembly 65 maintains pressure in the conduit 66, which closes the second relief valve assembly 75 and maintains pressure in the conduit 71 and thus in the second chamber 330, thereby maintaining the valve 350 in the closed position.

The indication device 90 may also be operable using the controller assembly 30 to indicate when the valve 350 is in the open position, the closed position, and transitioning between the open and closed positions. In one embodiment, indication device 90 may provide a solid green light via indicator 91 to signal that the valve 350 is in the open position. In one embodiment, indication device 90 may provide a solid red light via indicator 93 to signal that the valve 350 is in the closed position. In one embodiment, indication device 90 may provide a blinking yellow light via indicator 92 to signal that the valve 350 is moving between the open and closed positions. During operation of the valve actuator control sys-

tem 100, the controller assembly 30 may continuously communicate the status of the valve 350 to the indication device 90.

FIG. 2 illustrates a schematic view of the controller assembly 30 of the valve actuator control system 100 according to one embodiment. FIG. 2 illustrates "Rungs" A through G of a parallel control circuit that represent the opening and closing of the electrical contacts between the various components of the valve actuator control system 100. Rung A illustrates the power source 20. The remote control device 200 may transmit a signal to the controller assembly 30 to active an on/off switch connected to the power source 20, to communicate power from the power source 20 to Rungs B through G as described below.

Rungs B and C may represent a "latching" relay that is operable to open and close the first and second control valve assemblies 60, 65, which may be solenoid-type valves. The latching relay may remain in position in the absence of power, and may be moved from one position to another position when activated. As illustrated, the first control valve assembly 60 is actuated into a closed position and the second control valve assembly 65 is actuated into an open position. When in these positions, the valve actuator control system 100 is directing fluid pressure to the first chamber 320 via the first fluid circuit (conduits 41, 51, 61, 71) and relieving fluid pressure from the second chamber 330 via the exhaust circuit (44) and the quick relief circuit (46) as described above. The latching relay maintains the first and second control valves 60, 65 in these positions until re-activated to switch positions. Rungs B and C may include momentary relays and/or contacts 1, 2 configured to communicate power to relays and/or contacts 9, 11 to actuate the first and second control valve assemblies 60, 65.

Rungs D and E may represent low-amp relays that are in communication with the first and second transducers 80, 85. As illustrated, the first transducer 80 is activated to actuate the first pump assembly 50. In particular, the low-amp relay of Rung D provides an electrical connection to actuate a high-amp relay represented by Rung F to turn the first pump assembly 50 on, and thereby direct pressurized fluid from the fluid reservoir 40 to the first chamber 320. As illustrated, the second transducer 85 is de-activated to prevent actuation of the second pump assembly 55. In particular, the low-amp relay of Rung E prevents the electrical connection necessary to actuate a high-amp relay represented by Rung G that turns the second pump assembly 55 on, when desired to direct pressurized fluid from the fluid reservoir 40 to the second chamber 330. Rungs D and E may include relays and/or contacts 3, 4 and 5, 6, respectively, that are configured to communicate power to relays and/or contacts 12, 13 to actuate the first and second transducers 80, 85, respectively. Rungs F and G may include relays and/or contacts 7 and 8, respectively, that are configured to communicate power to relays and/or contacts 14, 16 to actuate the first and second pump assemblies 50, 55, respectively. The remote control device 200 may transmit a signal to the valve actuator control system 100 to open and close the various relays, thereby controlling actuation of the pump assemblies 50, 55, the control valve assemblies 60, 65, the relief valve assemblies 70, 75, and the transducers 80, 85 to actuate the valve actuator 300 as described herein.

FIG. 4 illustrates a valve actuator control system 500 for operating the valve actuator 300 according to one embodiment. The embodiments of the valve actuator control system 100 illustrated in FIG. 1 and described herein may be used with the embodiments of the valve actuator control system 500 illustrated in FIG. 4, and vice versa. The valve actuator control system 500 is comprised of many of the components

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of the valve actuator control system **100**. Similar components of the control systems **100** and **500** are referred to herein using the same reference numerals, and a full description of each component will not be repeated for brevity. Some of the components, such as the power source **20**, the receiver **15**, the indication device **90**, and various sensors/transducers, may be used with the valve actuator control system **500** but have been omitted for clarity.

The valve actuator control system **500** may include the housing **10** containing the controller assembly **30**, the pump assembly **50**, and the control valve assembly **60**. The control valve assembly **60** may also be operable as the first relief valve assembly **70** as described above with respect to the valve actuator control system **100**. The fluid reservoir **40** may be disposed adjacent to and/or exterior from the housing **10** for storing and supplying the fluid for actuation of the valve actuator **300**. One or more fluid lines, such as conduits **41**, **61**, may be provided to supply and return fluid between the fluid reservoir **40**, the pump assembly **50**, and/or the control valve assembly **60**.

The valve actuator control system **500** may be remotely operated via the remote control device **200** upon receiving a signal from an operator to actuate the valve actuator **300** to open and close the valve **350**. The signal from the remote control device **200** may be communicated to the controller assembly **30** to operate the valve actuator control system **500** similarly as described above with respect to the valve actuator control system **100**. The controller assembly **30** may actuate the pump assembly **50** to direct fluid from the fluid reservoir **40** to one of the chambers **320**, **330** of the valve actuator **300**, while fluid is returned to the fluid reservoir **40** from the other one of the chambers **320**, **330**. In one example, fluid may be supplied through fluid conduits **41**, **51**, **62**, **81** to the first chamber **320**, while fluid is returned from the second chamber **330** through fluid conduits **86**, **62**, **61** to the fluid reservoir **40**. In one example, fluid may be supplied through fluid conduits **41**, **51**, **62**, **86** to the second chamber **330**, while fluid is returned from the first chamber **330** through fluid conduits **81**, **62**, **61** to the fluid reservoir **40**. The control valve assembly **60** and/or the locking valve control **140** may be operable by the controller assembly **30**, and may be used to direct fluid communication through the valve actuator control system **500**. In one embodiment, the control valve assembly **60** may include one or more electrically controlled valves (such as solenoid valves), a 4-way/3-position control valve, double pilot operated check valves, one or more pressure relief valves, one or more pressure switches, and/or a manifold or fluid line connection.

In addition to remote operation, the valve actuator control system **500** may include an emergency valve control **120**, a manual valve control **130**, and/or a locking valve control **140**.

In the event of a loss or shutdown of one or more components of the valve actuator control system **500**, such as the pump assembly **50**, the valve **350** may be actuated using pressurized fluid that is stored and supplied by an accumulator storage **110**, which is controlled by the emergency valve control **120**. The emergency valve control **120** may be a manually and/or remotely operated valve assembly that may communicate fluid from the accumulator storage **110** to the valve actuator **300**. The accumulator storage **110** may include one or more (nitrogen) accumulator bottles for storing and supplying a sufficient amount of fluid to actuate or stroke the valve **350** at least four or more times. In one embodiment, the accumulator storage **110** may be pre-charged to a desired pressure using the pump assembly **50**. The emergency valve control **120** may be in communication with the controller

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assembly **30** to coordinate the operation of one or more of the other components during operation using the emergency valve control **120**.

During on-site operation, the valve actuator control system **500** may be operated using the manual valve control **130**. The manual valve control **130** may include a manually operated handle or lever to select an "open", "close", or "remote" operating position. When the manual valve control **130** is moved to the open position or the closed position, the manual valve control **130** may initiate operation of the pump assembly **50** to supply and/or return fluid through the one or more fluid conduits **41**, **52**, **131**, **81**, **86**, **62**, **61** to and/or from the valve actuator **300**. The manual valve control **120** may be in communication with the controller assembly **30** to coordinate the operation of one or more of the other components during operation using the manual valve control **120**. For example, the manual valve control **130** may override the control valve assembly **60** to direct fluid through the valve actuator control system **500** as necessary. When the manual valve control **130** is moved to the remote operation position, the valve actuator control system **500** is operable under the remote/automatic control regime. In one embodiment, the manual valve control **130** may include one or more hydraulic pumps, double pilot operated check valves, one or more pressure relief valves, one or more pressure switches, and/or a manifold or fluid line connection.

The valve actuator control system **500** may finally be operated using the locking valve control **140**. The locking valve control **140** may be a manually and operated valve assembly that may control fluid communication to the valve actuator **300**. The locking valve control **140** may be operable to open and close (allow and prevent) fluid communication to the valve actuator **300** from the control valve assembly **60**, the manual valve control **130**, and the emergency valve control **120**. The locking valve control **140** may include a manually operated handle or lever to select an "unlocked" or "locked" operating position. When the locking valve control **140** is moved to the unlocked position, fluid communication to the valve actuator **300** is open, and when the locking valve control **140** is moved to the locked position, fluid communication to the valve actuator **300** is closed. The locking valve control **140** may be in communication with the controller assembly **30** to coordinate the operation of one or more of the other components during operation using the locking valve control **140**. In one embodiment, the locking valve control **140** may include one or more electrically controlled valves (such as solenoid valves), a 4-way/3-position control valve, double pilot operated check valves, one or more pressure relief valves, one or more pressure switches, and/or a manifold or fluid line connection.

A valve indicator **360** comprising a first transducer **361** and a second transducer **362**, such as proximity sensors, may be coupled to the housing **310** of the valve actuator **300**. The valve indicator **360** may be operable to measure or sense the position of the valve shaft **365**, and communicate the position to the controller assembly **30**. For example, when the valve **350** is moved to the closed position, the second transducer **362** is operable to generate a signal indicating that the shaft **365** is within a pre-determined distance (proximity) relative to the second transducer **362**, while the first transducer **361** generates a signal indicating that the shaft **365** is outside of a pre-determined distance (proximity) relative to the first transducer **361**. The measurements of the first and second sensors **361**, **362** may provide an indication and confirmation that the valve **350** is in the closed position. When the valve **350** is moved to the open position, the shaft **365** may be raised to a position where it is within the pre-determined distances of

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both the first and second transducers **361, 362**, thereby providing an indication and confirmation that the valve **350** is in the open position. The measured position of the valve **350** can be communicated to an operator at a remote location via the controller assembly **30**.

In one embodiment, the valve actuator control system **500** may include the appropriate software and a touch-screen device for monitoring and controlling the operation of the valve actuator and the valve **350**. The touch-screen device may display the status of the valve actuator **300** and the valve **350** using one or more color indicators, such as green for open, yellow for neutral, and red for closed. The touch-screen device may be enabled with a one-push button control to open and close the valve actuator and the valve **350**. The touch-screen device may also display one or more measured characteristics, such as the opening and closing pressure and force of the valve actuator **300** and the valve **350**.

In one embodiment, transducers **80, 85** are operable to measure the fluid pressure within the fluid conduits **81, 86** that direct fluid to the chambers **320, 330** of the valve actuator **300**. The transducers **80, 85** may continuously monitor and measure the fluid pressure to determine both the pressure and force (thrust) necessary to actuate the valve **350** to the open and closed positions. During the life of the valve **350**, debris or other abrasive material may begin to collect and buildup within the valve **350**, thereby increasing drag on the gate of the valve **350** during operation. The increased drag or friction may also cause the pressure and force necessary to move the valve **350** to the open and/or closed position to increase. The increase in pressure and force as measured by the transducers **80, 85** may be communicated to an operator via the controller assembly **30** so that remedial actions may be taken before premature or excessive wear/damage to the valve **350** occurs. The pressure and force measurements as measured by the transducers **80, 85** may also be used to prevent premature rework or reconditioning of the valve **350** before it is necessary so as to maximize the work life of the valve **350**. In one embodiment, the valve actuator **300** may be rated for about 1500 psi to about 3000 psi operating pressure.

The valve actuator control systems **100, 500** provide numerous advantages, which include but are not limited to, durability to withstand harsh environments, compact size (small footprint), self contained (e.g. battery-powered), operating redundancy, and remote communication of operating characteristics.

While the foregoing is directed to embodiments of the invention, other and further embodiments of the invention

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may be devised without departing from the basic scope thereof, and the scope thereof is determined by the claims that follow.

The invention claimed is:

1. A valve actuator control system for use with a valve actuator, comprising:

- a first pump assembly;
- a second pump assembly;
- a first control valve assembly in fluid communication with the first pump assembly;
- a first relief valve assembly configured to open and close fluid flow between the first control valve assembly and the valve actuator;
- a second control valve assembly in fluid communication with the second pump assembly;
- a second relief valve assembly configured to open and close fluid flow between the second control valve assembly and the valve actuator;
- a fluid reservoir in communication with the first pump assembly, the second pump assembly, the first control valve assembly, the second control valve assembly, the first relief valve assembly, and the second relief valve assembly via one or more fluid circuits; and
- a controller assembly operable to actuate the first pump assembly or the second pump assembly via one or more relays to direct fluid from the fluid reservoir to the valve actuator via the one or more fluid circuits, and operable to actuate the first control valve assembly or the second control valve assembly via one or more relays to direct fluid from the valve actuator to the fluid reservoir via the one or more fluid circuits.

2. The system of claim 1, further comprising a remote control device operable to control the controller assembly via wired or wireless communication.

3. The system of claim 2, wherein the remote control device is operable to select the first or second pump assembly via the controller assembly to direct fluid from the reservoir to the valve actuator.

4. The system of claim 2, wherein the remote control device is operable to select the first or second control valve assembly via the controller assembly to direct fluid from the valve actuator to the fluid reservoir.

5. The system of claim 1, further comprising an explosion proof housing for enclosing the first and second pump assemblies, the first and second control valve assemblies, the fluid reservoir, and the controller assembly.

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